MIDWEST COMPUTER GENEALOGISTS

NEWSLETTER

www.mcgenealogist.org

Volume XXV **November, 2021** **Number 11**
archive edition

A NEW ENGLAND MOTHER'S THANKSGIVING

This is an excerpt of an 1880 newspaper story, said to be set in 1873.* Though presumably fiction, it provides rich details of scenes in old New England rural home life. It is easy to suppose that, within the description, is much truth of a way of life cherished by our New England ancestors. (Submitted by Julia Morse)

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An old brown farm house rested snugly in the little hollow among the Massachusetts hills. A quaint old house with great chimneys, a sloping roof and dormer windows, with tall walnut trees swaying over it, and a great bitter-sweet vine clambering over the low eaves and mossy shingle roof, its clustering berries opening their scarlet hearts under the keen frost-touches. There are clumps of great lilac and snowberry bushes in the yard, and dry stalks where hollyhocks and asters had bloomed, with a few hardy marigolds still lingering in sunny corners.

There is a garden at the foot of the yard, an old-fashioned garden, with its broad center walk down from the picket gate, with a row of beehives under the plum trees on one side and bunches of carraway and anise, and fennel and dill, for summer Sundays and winter seed-cakes on the other, with a hedge of currant and raspberry bushes, a spreading barberry in one corner, and a border of sage and summer savory and saffron and pennyroyal. And in front of the garden wide meadows, for the old house stands amid its clustering barns, apart from even the drowsy stir of the quiet country road, with the heights of far, blue mountainous hills lifting on the north, and in the east a narrow glimpse of the sea whose breaking surf may be heard in storms or the stillness of clear nights.

The entrance is up a shaded grassy lane, whose gate rolling on clumsy wooden wheels is seldom closed; on the one side is the meadow, on the other a stubble field of corn, and beyond that the orchard with interlacing arches of gnarled old trees, and out from among these juice-gathering roots, bubbles a clear spring that trickles down across the lane, into a sunken mossy trough where the horses are led to water and the cows love to linger on their way to the milking yard.

It is Thanksgiving Day, cold and grayly clear, with a thin pale sunshine over all the soft brown fields and russet woods where the leaves of the oak and beech still cling, but the walnut trees have long been bare, the lane is full of the dry rustling leaves of the apple and maple, and the thread of a brook murmurs half-choked by them; the barberrys gleam redder than ever among their brown branches, as do the few ungathered apples swaying on high and scattered boughs.

It is Thanksgiving Day in the wide old kitchen where the broad fireplace and brick oven stretch behind the stove, and on the high mantel glisten shining brass candle sticks, the floor white-scoured, and whiter still by contrast with the heavy wainscoting and many-paneled doors, almost ebony black by time and bright by frequent rubbing.

But there is no stir of glad bustle, and the old turkey stands around the door and shakes his red head in calm security. Holidays are the saddest days in the year. When there is only silence and vacant places for the dear ones that once made their fullness complete, and so the white-faced widow feels as she goes about her simple morning duties. There is the early breakfast, and then she takes from its stand the worn family Bible, in which is written the birth and death of the husband and father, whose fingers had turned its

pages for so many years, and the children who gathered in that old kitchen to listen, till, children no longer, they had gone forth from the home, some to the tumults of life, some to the hush of the grave. In a voice that is tremulous with years and many sorrows she reads the chapter indicated by the faded ribbon as the one in "course," while the shock-headed hired man sits very upright, his thumbs pressed hard together in token of respectful attention. Then follows a prayer, in which the daily needs through long repetition have crystalized into a set form of phraseology.

John is used to it all, to the remembrance of "this Thy young servant now before Thee," and for the absent, and to the tremor that always thrills her voice as she asks for the "missing one, that if he be among the living the arms of love may still be about him," and only thinks that she is most through, and he will go out and feed the cows their cornstalks.

By and by he brings the brown horse and still older "calash top" around to the stepping stone, and the little widow, in her carefully kept black, steps in, with a gentle reproof to John for not going, too, and taking the lines into her mittened hands drives the two miles over the frozen hilly road to the "center church," and all alone in the long, high-backed pew, save for the memories that cluster there, listens to the Proclamation and Thanksgiving sermon.

Passing out at the close of the service, through neighboring family groups, gathering with cheerful greetings and chatter, a dimness comes before her eyes at the sight as she turns away up the steep lonely road, the raw wind beating sharply in her face. John is waiting to hurry the horse into the stable, and then goes whistling away over the fields to his own thanksgiving.

As she enters the warm kitchen the toothsome flavor of the chicken she has put to roast (for she cannot let the day pass without some light observance of the feast) meets her, but the tall old clock ticking so loudly in the corner is the only sound that breaks the stillness and the great gray cat rubbing about her is the only living thing that bids her welcome.

Never before has Thanksgiving Day found her utterly alone. Once there were fires in the "square rooms," a long table with a great turkey for the centerpiece, and the house rang with gay voices and laughter among which Harry's was the merriest of all. Only last year Jane was with her, but looking from her window across the hills she can see the white stones gleaming in the little burying ground where the autumn leaves are drifting over Jane's grave, and Harry—it is three years since she has heard of him, three years that she has been secretly praying God for the unspeakable comfort of knowing that he, her baby, her darling, has found the same quiet rest; and now Elizabeth in Wisconsin and James and Luther in Iowa are urging her to leave the old farm and come to them. No, she cannot live alone, but they do not know what they ask. Leave the old house, the home to which she came as a bride, the rooms where she sang lullabies to her babies and folded the hands of her dead?

And so absorbed in memory as she draws out the little round table and spreads it for the solitary meal, it is not strange that she does not hear a step coming through the dry leaves in the lane, a step that pauses by the little brook and again at the barberry bush; that hesitates at the gate and, coming softly up the stone walk, lifts the latch slowly and gently. The widow hears that. Some neighbor is coming in. She will put on another plate.

But it is no neighbor's face that greets hers as she looks up. The plate (and it is one of her best China, too) falls to the floor in fragments, and she walks over them all unconscious, and the chicken in the oven gives many a warning sputter, before she is aware of anything save the joy that this, her son that was dead is alive again, was lost and is found.

There might have been gayer, merrier Thanksgiving dinners eaten that day, but hardly one of more heartfelt happiness than that in the wide, low-ceiled kitchen, with the November afternoon sun shining through the tiny-paned windows shaded by the scarlet flecked bitter-sweet vine; where blue jays and a late robin or two chattered and fluttered over their Thanksgiving.

*Printed in November 1880 as "A Thanksgiving Story" in various newspapers in Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska; attributed to the "Cleveland Herald".

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Al Morse

In 1963, I began my teaching career in the Independence, Missouri Public School District. I taught mathematics for 31 years full time plus 4 more years as a part time teacher in a special program called The Mathematics and Physics Institute

During that first year, my wife, Dorothy Jean (Newcomb) Morse, and I visited my grandparents, Clark Frank and Alma Dona (Miller) Morse. They lived in Rich Hill, Bates County, Missouri. My grandfather's mother, Nancy (Ward) Morse, was a teacher in the 1860's and maybe other decades. Since I was the first grandchild to become a teacher, my grandparents told me to go upstairs and bring down a box. They told me that they were giving it to me. The box contained several school books, many of them with my father's name in them. There were also books with the names of his brothers, Fred and Charles, and his sister, Doris. Some of the books were math or arithmetic books. I found that the story problems were much different than those in the current textbooks. They mostly dealt with farming and some different measurements that were used then but later became old fashioned. For example, they used the distance measure of rods instead of feet or yards and the measure of liquids with hogsheads instead of gallons. In the box, were also two autograph books of my grandfathers. There was also a hand held school bell used by my great grandmother.

When I took it to my house in Independence, I looked through the box. I was impressed, but it did not mean a lot to me at that time. Over the years, I would look at some of the books. A couple of years ago I gave the books to my cousin, Julia Morse. I also included books that came from the house where I grew up.

I still have the two autograph books and the school bell. On the first page of the oldest book, in part, is this writing.

"Jan. 19, 1894 Dear Brother. Go thou in lifes fare morning ….. . Your sister, Ella"

Later in the book is this.

"Feb. 4, 1890, To my Frank, Always speak the truth. This is noble for a child and as years go by it will make a good and great man. Your Mother" Frank was born August 26, 1882.

The second autograph book was probably given to him at Christmas as the inside cover has "C. F. Morse, New Home, Missouri, Dec. 25,1901". On an early page, is this autograph.

"New Home, Jan. 21,1901, Dear Friend, May the path be ever fair. May faithful friends thy sorrows share. May joys around thy pathway gather. And guardian angels o'er thee hover. Ever your true friend, Dona Miller."

Dona's father, William Barton Miller, was a farmer and a minister. Frank and Dona were married January 17, 1906.

In each of the books, were autographs by other Miller children and Frank's step-brother, Charles. There were many other names that I recognized. Some were people that I actually knew, or they had last names of people that I later knew. Some of the writings were difficult to read and some were about worn out through time. These have become very sentimental items.

THIS MONTH'S WEBINAR RECOMMENDATIONS: BASICS OF NEW ENGLAND RESEARCH

Ann G. Lawthers, Genealogist, New England Historic Genealogical Society, AmericanAncestors.org
Presented 28 October 2021
https://youtu.be/yF4RlkXTAHM

Ann gives a great overview of the settlement patterns and history of the New England area, which provides context for understanding the situation and records of our ancestors. She then presents a very thorough overview of how to locate your ancestor's home place names and where to search for records based on their

location. She demonstrates record searches for both FamilySearch.org (free) and Ancestry, as well as some from AmericanAncestors.org.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND ANCESTRY WITH AMERICANANCESTORS.ORG

Julia Morse

Many computer genealogists get daunted when they work back to ancestors who lived prior to the U.S. Censuses and easy-to-read grave markers. However, it turns out that the communities of New England were careful record-keepers. Further, there has been more genealogical "scholarship" (that is, serious study, compilation, and publication of family histories) during this region than any other people group in the world.

The New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) presents video training and access to resources of interest to New England at their site, AmericanAncestors.org.

For the purposes of research at the NEHGS, "New England" includes the present-day states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Free-to-view database records at AmericanAncestors.org include:

Massachusetts vital records (marriages and births)

Massachusetts probate records (including fully digitized images)

Massachusetts: Historical Data Relating to Cities and Towns (Helpful for understanding dates of towns, changing names, neighboring towns or villages, etc.)

Massachusetts: Early Report of Native Americans, 1861

Vermont: Windham and Windsor County Census, 1771

New York: Wills, 1626-1836

Index of Revolutionary War Pensioners, 1800-1900

U. S. Social Security Death Index

For a complete list of AmericanAncestors.org databases free to view without a membership, link here: https://americanancestors.org/browse-all-databases?IsFree=true&size=50&page=1

From the free search resources from AmericanAncestors.org, I was able to quickly find, view, and download images of birth records, marriage records, and—to my great pleasure--entire probate document packages of some of my Morse family ancestors who lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1637 through the 1700's.

A search of the AmericanAncestors.org databases will also yield some results that are not viewable without a paid membership. The good news is that the databases generally give you enough key words and dates associated with the members-only record image, that you can get a good idea of whether there are records of real interest to you before you decide to invest in a membership. More good news: There is a 3-month membership option for just $34.95. (I think of that as comparable to the price of a good genealogy book.) If you require more than three months (for example, if you regularly research New England ancestors) there are annual options and even a family option which can be spread over three family members.

Part of Ann's Lawther's webinar presentation overviews books that provide biographical sketches and references. These are typically consulted by serious researchers of colonial ancestors, a means of taking advantage of the research legwork already done by others. For most of these books, AmericanAncestors.org has digitized the content to be available to its members as part of its databases. Otherwise, most of these books are under copyright and must be accessed in print or CD format either at a genealogy library or purchase. You can learn more about these books and how they can help your search for colonial ancestors by watching a video by one of Ann's colleagues, Lindsay Fulton, "17th Century New England Research: Commonly Used Sources" (presented by Lisa Louise Cooke's Genealogy Gems), https://youtu.be/AG1TzZ79buQ.

To better predict or understand the migration patterns of our ancestors (either where they came from, or where they migrated to), Lindsay Fulton recommends the book *The Expansion of New*

England: The Spread of New England Settlement to the Mississippi River 1620-1865 by Lois Kimball Mathews, 1909. The 1909 edition can be read online or downloaded freely as a text, PDF, or eBook at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/expansionofnewen00rose/page/n7/mode/2up

PUBLISHING FAMILY BOOKS

Marjorie Slavens

Both Al Morse and I have benefitted from the research and publication of family history by his cousin, Laura Frances Seals Scott, and my mother, Mildred Welty Slavens. There are many more acccessible ways of book publication now than they could use as they were publishing their books.

My mother was born December 2, 1910 in Westport and lived there for the first four years of her life. After the birth of her brother, Edward Charles Welty (1913-2010), her parents decided to move to Kansas City, Kansas, where her sisters, Helen Virginia Welty Olson(1915-2002), Kathryn Elizabeth Welty Farr (1918-2009), and Evelyn Dolores Welty Stewart, 1920-2020) were born. They grew up on 13th Street and attended school there. She met my father, Ralph Westmeier Slavens (1907-1983) while both were visiting their grandparents in Asbury, Missouri in the summer of 1930, and they were married October 12, 1930.

In the early '70s at a family gathering at the home of their mother, Hattie Lee Kerr Welty, Mother's sisters told her that she should write a family history since she was the oldest and they knew very little about their ancestors beyond their grandparents. Easier said than done!

Mother had asked her father, Edward Alonzo Welty (1884-1954) about his parents, and he gave her the names without much additional information. He said his father, Henry Welty, was born in Lancaster County, Ohio. There is no Lancaster County; he was born in Bremen near the city of Lancaster in Fairfield County, which is southeast of Columbus. She knew her grandfather had been in the Civil War and she had a picture of him in his uniform, but she did not know where and when he served until she did her own research. Mother learned that her paternal grandmother was Catharine Mary Eppright Welty (1848-1928), but her father told her nothing about his Welty and Eppright grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Weltys in his generation, and possibly in previous generations were not very communicative. Mother knew her maternal grandfather, Charles Merlin Kerr, but she knew nothing about his 13 step-brothers and step-sisters. She knew that her maternal grandmother, Elzina H. (Ella) Heape, had died in 1895 when her mother was only 6 years old. Her grandfather had given her some books that belonged to his first wife, but she knew little more about her grandmother's family. (Her mother was not fond of old books and gave these books away one summer when Mother was not at home.)

She began her research at the St. Louis Public Library with microfilm of U.S. Census records and many county histories. When she visited my sister, Carol, in this area, she benefitted from the extensive collection of the Mid-Continent Library, and she visited this library at least twice a week when she moved to Blue Springs in 1990. Like other researchers in the 1975-2000 years, Mother had to depend on trips to court houses, libraries, cemeteries, genealogical societies, the National Archives and DAR Library, etc. in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas for the family history material she used in early editions of her books.

She published two family books in 1981, which she typed on the manual typewriter my parents gave me when I went to college in 1954. Her copies were made with carbon paper–no home photo copiers in those days. One of the books was on the Peter Welty family with a few pages at the end on the Eppright family. A second book was on the Kerr family with a few pages on the Heape family. She included a few pictures, but not many in the first editions. The two books were duplicated at the Washington University Library, and she had them bound with heavy covers by a firm near her home.

The second edition of her book on the Welty family was published by the duplicating department at Rockford College, where I was teaching. It had about 200 pages and included more pictures. It had a heavy paper cover. I typed the book from her Electric

typewriter copies on my Apple IIE computer, and the copies were printed on a dot matrix printer. She subsequently published a third edition of the Welty book, two editions with a third in process of the Jacob Eppright book, two editions of the James Kerr book, two editions of the Robert Heape book, A James Crawford book, and a Welty Family Letters book. She included wills in the text of the books. She included copies of marriage records and other legal documents as separate pages. Editions of her books published after 1995 were printed on a lazer printer, duplicated by UPS, and bound by us with binders we purchased and could use to assemble additional copies as we needed them.

Mother kept her date in Family Treemaker, but she did not publish her books in this format. She believed the family stories of each individual should be more complete and more readable if they were going to be shared with family members not familiar with the basic data. I indexed each of the books; it was very difficult to use some older histories which had not been indexed.Each book had a Prologue which briefly described the background of the family and acknowledged the help she had received from individuals, libraries, and genealogical societies. The books were organized as follows:

"Key to the Organization of the Welty Family History

This history begins with the first generation in America, Peter Welty, who came to this country in 1727. The first generation of the family is designated by the letter "P". Each succeeding generation is designated by a number. For example, Linda Jean Shockley Donahue is listed as 1-2-1-6-8-4-2-P. Linda is the first child(1) of Beverly Jean Slavens Shockley (2), the second child of Mildred Marie Welty Slavens (1), the first child of Edward Alonzo Welty (6), the sixth child of Henry Welty (8), the eighth child of John Welty (4), the fourth child of John Welty, Jr. (11), the eleventh child of John Welty, Sr. (2), the second child of Peter Welty (P). Roman numerals refer to generations of the family, and Peter Welty is the first generation."

Mother was not interested in profiting financially from her books. When other researchers requested copies, she charged them for the cost of printing and mailing the books.

I gave Mother her first computer for her 86th birdthday in 1996 and helped her get on the net. She continued to visit the libraries, court houses, cemeteries, etc., but she could research using U.S. Genweb, Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com, and good sites like GenCircles. She could share with more researchers and gradually obtained more information from other researchers; she usually gave more information than she received. By the time we moved to Foxwood Springs in 1998, Mother was recognized by our Computer Club as our best Internet researcher, and she served on our Residents' Website Committee.

Family research and opportunities for sharing with other researchers have improved dramatically. In addition to the early memberships she had, Fold3 and Family Search are excellent sites, and much more is available online than the sources she had when she published her books. This newsletter has provided me with a way to share her research. There are many more opportunities for researching at home and for publishing our books in better form than was available to her, but we continue to benefit from the research of earlier family historians as we continue to develop our family histories.

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